



Essentially Hermeto
Erik Charlston JazzBrasil (Sunnyside)
by Elliott Simon

Brazilian composer/multi-instrumentalist Hermeto Pascoal is the perfect muse for this first release from vibraphonist Erik Charlston's JazzBrasil project. The marvelously varied terrain of Pascoal's original compositions is adeptly covered by this finely-put-together sextet as they combine Brazilian rhythms with modern jazz instrumentation and chordal complexity. But composition and instrumentation are only two facets of Pascoal's nature-based vitalism that Charlston embraces. Of equal importance is the composer's ethos of eschewing musical mechanization and holding that everything is sound. That philosophy is elegantly presented by this multifarious ensemble of saxophonist Ted Nash (who triples on clarinet and flute), pianist Mark Soskin, bassist Jay Anderson, drummer Rogério Boccato and percussionist Café.

An extension of the concept of sacred geometry, which views naturally appearing shapes as part of an overall inherent order, is skillfully extended here to sound. As Charlston points out, "All Sound is Music" and as all things vibrate, all things produce sound. Humans may just not be able to hear them as such but that is where Pascoal and Charlston come in. Part of Pascoal's genius is a range that includes all types of sounds and Charlston has turned these pieces into well-executed jazz that hasn't lost its soul or affinity with nature. The Brazilian countryside, rainforest and Carnaval are all here as trees rustle, brooks flow, birds call and whistles blow but within a modern jazz context.

Nash is superb and he blends exceptionally well with this precise rhythm section not only to flavor and augment but to blow. Charlston's vibes vary from eerily bell-like to super-sonically charged and his leadership and classical training is evident in the tight structures, harmonic interplay with Soskin and panoramic and cultural vistas portrayed by the music. *Essentially Hermeto* is a first-rate melding of jazz and mother earth - a late Friday night set at the Blue Note held in the Brazilian rain forest.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com. This group is at Dizzy's Club Nov. 7th. See Calendar.



Crossroads Unseen
Jason Kao Hwang/Edge
(Euonymus)



Symphony of Souls
Jason Kao Hwang/
Spontaneous River (Mulatta)

by Robert Iannapolo

It's difficult keeping violinist Jason Kao Hwang's career in perspective. He recently came in second place in one magazine's poll as "rising star on violin". Amazing place to be for a musician who has been making challenging music since the early '80s. The recent archival release of the music of Commitment (a band he had with Will Connell, William Parker and Zen Matsura) made between 1981-83 was on many ten best lists last year. Hwang's multi-cultural Far East Side Band was one of the bright spots of the '90s. In recent years, Hwang has led his quartet Edge and been working on larger-scale pieces for a 10-piece ensemble integrating Eastern and Western instruments (*Burning Bridge*) and a string orchestra (*Spontaneous River*). Hwang is more than a mere rising star on his instrument and making his mark as a composer as well.

Edge (with cornetist Taylor Ho Bynum, bassist Ken Filiano and drummer Andrew Drury) has been Hwang's primary group since he disbanded the Far East Side Band. They're now three albums old and one of the most creative and unique bands operating in improvised music today. Opening with the rousing "Elemental Determination", they maneuver through the various landmines and tempo shifts of the composition with ease. Drury, an underrated drummer, is impressive when, after a vigorous solo by Hwang, he effortlessly slips into a rhythm that totally changes the character of the music for Bynum's subsequent solo. The entire album continues in this vein with Hwang's compositions morphing in unexpected ways. Bynum and Hwang play off each other well with the Filiano/Drury rhythm team capable of generating as much interest as the frontline. *Crossroads Unseen* sounds like a mature band at the peak of their powers and is the strongest Edge release yet.

Symphony of Souls focuses on Hwang the composer. A work that has been in gestation for several years, Hwang assembled a group of 38 string players, including violin, viola, guitar, cello and bass, who were comfortable both interpreting scores and improvising. Hwang himself plays the opening and closing statements solo, which frees him to conduct the rest of the piece. His role includes both conducting and conduction and it's a measure of the skill of these musicians as well as Hwang's organizing principles that they carry off the work with aplomb.

The work itself is a sprawling 60-minute, 11-movement piece that explores the string orchestra in minute detail. Writing for strings would seem to be natural for Hwang and it's clear he's in his element, subdividing the violins, matching guitars with cellos,



Compos
drumm
Chip

His new tw
**Personal
& Percu**

All-star
R
S
W
Pa
R
c
Pet

Personal Debut
Tributes is the
series for pe
complementi
More Dedicati
on disc 1 and

Downbeat gay
stars and sa
two-CD set of
dedications to
fine car . . . W
swings with
originals. The
as

Buy al

